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Ghanaian Folk Music and Dances: a Potential Foreign Exchange Earner for Ghana?

By [Erin B](#) 26/04/2012 22:28:00 | [Blogs](#)

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A proverb from Benin says "When you Practice Your Culture, It Never Dies"....This adage is very true of all the countries that have made progress because they practice their culture. But is this true of Ghana? Well, Yes and No are appropriate answers. As many of us know, when we talk about culture, people only think of Traditional Music and Dance. To many of us, this is tantamount to idol worship. Well, it is true to some extent but culture is more than that. It includes our names, houses, language, norms, values, religion etc. One interesting development taking place in the world today is the high enthusiasm that the

outside world in having in our performance arts. Many Institutions of Higher Learning abroad have established

Study Abroad programmes for their students in Ghana and the economic significance of this exchanges, for the host institutions in Ghana is worth discussing. The African Studies Department of the University of Ghana, the Department of Theater and Performing Arts, University of Cape Coast, The University College of Education's Performing Arts Department, the Ashesi University's Music and dance Programme and many of the National Centres for Culture are names worth mentioning.

This article today is a response to an overwhelming questions we have been receiving from our foreign readers about Ghanaian cultural music and dance. We are therefore dedicating our piece today to our arts and culture with the hope that it will not only educate the non-Ghanaian but re-orient us about what many of us might have forgotten. We consulted many sources for these information and special appreciation goes to a US based Ghanaian Ethnomusicologist and Cultural Educator, Mr. Harold Akyeampong, the Director in charge of African Studies Department of the world renowned folklore organisation, the Center for World Folkloric Arts. Please note that the information on Ghana has been written in the most simplest language to ensure that people understand it rather than write in academic lingo.

Ghana General Introduction:

Ghana is an English speaking nation in the Western part of Africa, the size of Oregon in the United States. It is bordered to the East by the Republic of Togo, the West by La Cote D'Ivoire (aka Ivory Coast), the North by Burkina Faso and the South by the sea known as the Gulf of Guinea. Ghana like most African countries was colonized by the British and it won its Independence as a free nation on 6th March, 1957. It has a lot of natural resources such as Gold, Diamond and Oil.

Geographically, Ghana is divided into 10 main regions with many districts for administrative purposes. It is a democratic country with an elected government, the National Democratic Congress under President Professor John Atta Mills. It has a population of about 24.5 million and has numerous ethnic groupings each with its unique culture and language.

Music and Dance:

The Music and Dances of Ghana are diverse corresponding to its many ethnic groupings. The sound and movements varies from ethnic group and region. They are mainly divided into two main regions for the purposes of aesthetics and performance classifications. The South region which comprises mostly the Akan States, the Ga-Adangbe, the Ewe and the Nzema make use of principally, percussion instruments such as Atumpan, Talking Drums, Atsimemevu, Boma etc.. While the Northern sector uses Aerophones, Chordophones and idiophones such as the Goje, Xylophones, and Castanets. Generally, Ghanaian music incorporates several distinct types of musical instruments, many of which are in an ensemble setting: .Almost all the music making has its corresponding dances which are organized as community events and activity for all occasions.

Among the popular dances are Kpanlogo, Kundum, Kadodo, Apatampa, Adowa, Adzewa, Kete, Nwomkro, Fontonfrom, Kpatsa, Gota, Asafo, Agbadza, Agbekor, Fume Fume, Otu, Kple, Akom, Asafo, Bamaaya, Jira, Takai, Bawa, Epirede, Mpintsin, Akosua Tuntum, Oge, Gome, etc.

Gota

This social dance for youth in the Volta Region of Ghana is a community dance among the Ewes. Usually a duet for the opposite sex, the dancers use the non-verbal language of dance through flexible torso and pelvic movements. This movement flow is interjected with a sharp silence freeze. This pause is unique in its own right because that

total silence is part of the Gota music and dance. The master drummer commands the entire dance piece. The music is polyrhythmic, interwoven in a fabric of sound created by many distinct and contrasting phrases played simultaneously. The basic rhythm of each instrument is carefully crafted to contribute to the power of the overall rhythm. As the parts repeat, the players reach their aesthetic goal: a beautifully integrated whole with subliminal nurturing undercurrents to elevate the mind and soul.

Jira

This is a special dance for the Dagomba people of the Dagbon traditional area in the Northern part of Ghana. It is shared that it is believed to have been a dwarf's dance and not everyone sees this special dance.

Bamaya

A dance of the Dagbamba people of the Northern region of Ghana means the river valley is wet. Originally a religious harvest dance, it now functions as social dance. The dance involves a lot of waist movements: Bamaya, the dance is usually performed by men in ladies' skirts, involves wiggling of the pelvis. This special dance is based on the story of a man who maltreated his wife, resulting in a plague of famine for the whole territory. It was revealed that in order to humble the man in question to his wife, all the men in the village had to dress like women - hence the Bamaya costume. The gender equality element furnishes us with food for thought...be nice to all living things. Some schools of traditional thought links the dance movements of Bamaya to fanning off mosquitoes.

Gahu

Gahu means "expensive" or "jewel" in the Ewe language. It is a recreational dance. Through cultural integration among the neighbouring countries of the West Africa Sub-Region, the Gahu dance has traveled from Nigeria into the Anlo communities in Ghana. This is apparent in the costumes and also in the movements, which are Yoruba, modified by the characteristic Agbadza dance form popular with the Anlo people. Its graceful movements exhibit elegance and dignity with meaning.

Kpatsa

"Anyemi yo lee mo ba ooh!" The song calls for the young Ga-Adagme sisters to join the dance ring. It has social characteristics in its form and creates an avenue for the people to share the stories of the day through its rich musical accompaniment.

Kpanlogo

A dance created by Otoo Lincoln in the Sakumo Tsonshi area of Accra in the early 1960s,

Is a recreational music and dance by the Ga-Adangbe people of Accra, the capital. Movements in the dance reflects themes such as Social Issues, Politics, Expression of human Feelings ie. Love and other Topical issues: One of the popular and most basic accompanying song "ABC" tells the story of the Ga folks learning the alphabet through to the letter "P", and then taking a break to dance Kpanlogo, as narrated by Otoo Lincoln at Sakumo Tsonsi in Accra Ghana. The songs combine social commentary and drum-language with roots in the ethnic idioms.

Fume Fume

Mustapher Tetteh Addy, the founder of the Music Academy at Kokrobitey, Accra, created Fume Fume music and dance. The energy and vigor of this dance takes your entire soul into another realm. The dancers wear grass skirts characteristic to that of the ancient warriors of the land.

“Funtre ma ye ye yee”... a call for Fume Fume dancers, they charge into the dance ring. It is a creative dance with explosive energetic movements based on Ghanaian traditions.

Bawa

Also called BEWAA is a recreational dance of the Youth of Dagara community in the Upper West region of Ghana. This dance comes with many expressive movements.

Takai

Is a recreational circle dance of the Dagomba people. It is performed during funerals and festivals.

Adowa:

An elegant majestic movement dance is originally a royal court dance of the Ashantis. It's development evolved into becoming a special music and dance performed at funeral rites. Today the music and dance has been adopted by many community groups. It is a very expressive dance.

TO BE CONTINUED...

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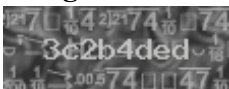
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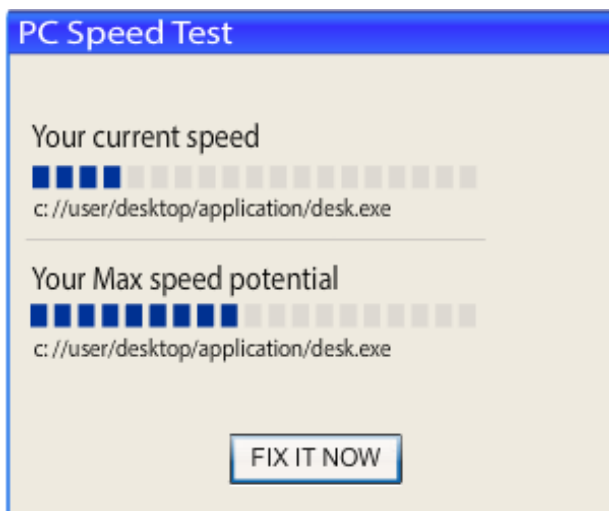
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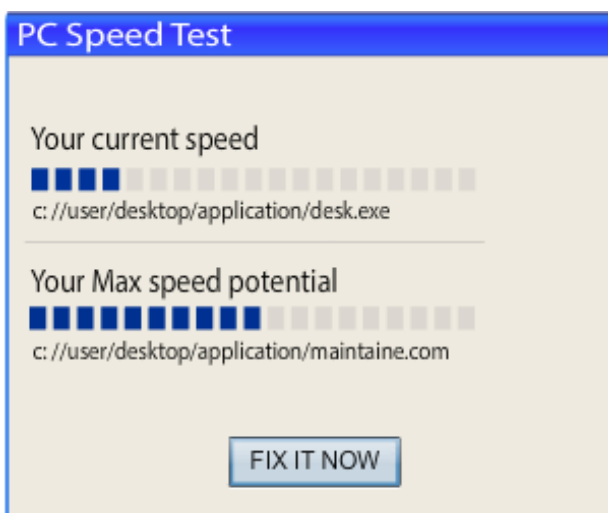
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